

Synthesizing Research Cheat Sheet

PSY 311: Research Methods

When we synthesize the literature we write about behavior and phenomena not about specific researchers or their specific studies. As the Lecture Video demonstrates, when we synthesize the literature we write sentences such as

- **“Phoney painkillers can lessen our pain”** rather than writing the sentence, “A study by Colloca and Bendetti (2006) showed that phoney painkillers can lessen our pain.”
- **“Phoney alcohol can lead us to do things we might otherwise resist”** rather than the sentence, “Cheong and Negate (1999) found that phoney alcohol can lead us to do things we might otherwise resist.”
- **“Phoney feedback can even cause us to shed body fat”** rather than “It has been found that phoney feedback can even cause us to shed body fat.”

When we synthesize the literature, rather than MadLibbing it, we DO write sentences such as

- **“Cognitive Dissonance’s range extends from maze running in rats (Lawrence & Festinger, 1962) to the development of values in children (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1963); from the hunger of college sophomores (Brehm et al., 1964) to the proselytizing behavior of religious zealots (Festinger et al., 1956).”**

When we synthesize the literature, rather than MadLibbing it, we DON’T write sentences such as

“Lawrence and Festinger (1962) reported that cognitive dissonance occurs in rats” OR

“In a recent study, Aronson and Carlsmith (1963) found that cognitive dissonance affects the development of values in children” OR

“It has been revealed that college sophomores show cognitive dissonance (Brehm et al. 1964)” OR

“Cognitive Dissonance has been found to occur in religious zealots (Festinger et al. 1956).”

IF you find yourself

- making the grammatical subject of your sentence researchers’ names (“Yi and Ortega found ...” or “Williams et al. reported ...”) or making the grammatical subject “some researchers” (“Some researchers have shown ...”) or “some research,” “much research,” “recent research” (e.g., “Recent research has shown ...”);

IF you find yourself

- using expressions such “It was found ...” or “It was reported ...” or “It was shown ...” or “It was revealed ...” (and their parallel expressions, e.g., “[Something] has been found/reported/shown/revealed...”);

IF you find yourself

- using the words “Significant results have been found for ...” or “Significant results have been reported for ...” or “Significant results have been shown for ...”

you’re probably NOT synthesizing the literature. But you want TO synthesize the literature!

Synthesizing the literature means writing about behavior and phenomena, rather than MadLibbing the literature, which looks like you’ve filled in the blanks with the researchers’ names, the number of participants, the task they used, and the like, as though you were playing the game of MadLibs.

The reasons why you are learning in this course how to synthesize the literature rather than MadLib it are, first, synthesizing the literature will make your writing more enjoyable for others to read. And, second, other professors in the Psychology Department have specifically requested Professor Gernsbacher to teach PSY 225 students to synthesize the literature and not MadLib it! So, it’s great to learn how to synthesize the literature.